Beyond Stranger Danger

What You Can and Should Do to Protect Children
Parents’ #1 Responsibility is to keep their children safe.
What is “Stranger Danger”? 
Children are instructed from an early age not to talk to strangers.

This message is insufficient and counterproductive in keeping children safe.
5 Reasons Why “Stranger Danger” Misses the Mark

1) Most incidents of abduction and harm to children is done by someone they know well – a parent, step-parent, other relative, babysitter, or family friend.

Only about 100 cases of kidnapping annually are stereotypical “stranger” abductions.

200,000 are abducted by family members.

Telling children to not interact with strangers does not eliminate the cause of most of the harm.
2) Young children do not understand what a stranger is.

When asked, they identify a stranger as someone who is “mean” or “ugly.” A nice, attractive person is not seen as a stranger in their eyes.
3) Adults talk to strangers all the time: a salesperson, friendly person on the bus, a new neighbor.

This is confusing for children.
4) Being afraid of all strangers creates unnecessary fear, and can contribute to nightmares, anxiety and unhappiness in children.
5) When we tell children to ‘never talk to strangers,’ we eliminate a key source of help for them.

If a child really is in danger, they need to know how to engage strangers to assist them, be a police officer or other uniformed person, a shopkeeper or neighbor.
Better Messages to Keep Children Safe

- Only go somewhere with people you know.
- If you need help, approach a person in uniform (for example, a police officer or firefighter).
- Go to a building (like a store or library) where you can get help.

*Note:* The key is to have build children’s awareness and sense of competence.
Developmentally Appropriate Messages

• A preschooler can be taught to stay where there are if they are lost in a store, and wait for their parent to find them.

• An elementary school child can learn her parent’s cell phone number, and know how to get help in placing a call.

• A middle or high school child who takes a bus or walks home from school can learn to get help from a shopkeeper or neighbor if he thinks someone is following him.

Note: Age-appropriate messages that are tailor-made to the specific child and the situations they may face help parents equip their children with tools that can keep them safe.
Whose job is it to keep children safe?
The Role of Adult Supervision

- **Watchfulness**
- Knowledge of child development
- **Anticipatory guidance**
- Great care in sharing the responsibility for the safety of your child with others
The Need to Change Key Messages We Communicate to Children

• Do what adults say. ➔ Teach your child to say, “No.”

• Only adults deserve privacy. ➔ Everyone has a right to privacy.

• Avoid difficult conversations. ➔ Talk openly about sensitive issues.

• Children only understand baby talk ➔ Teach children proper words.

• Secrets are fun. ➔ Don’t keep secrets from parents.

• Children’s feelings are unimportant. ➔ Elicit and value children’s feelings.
Children need all of our best efforts to keep them safe.
Contact Me

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